

Representative William Eickmeyer

Report to the 35th District

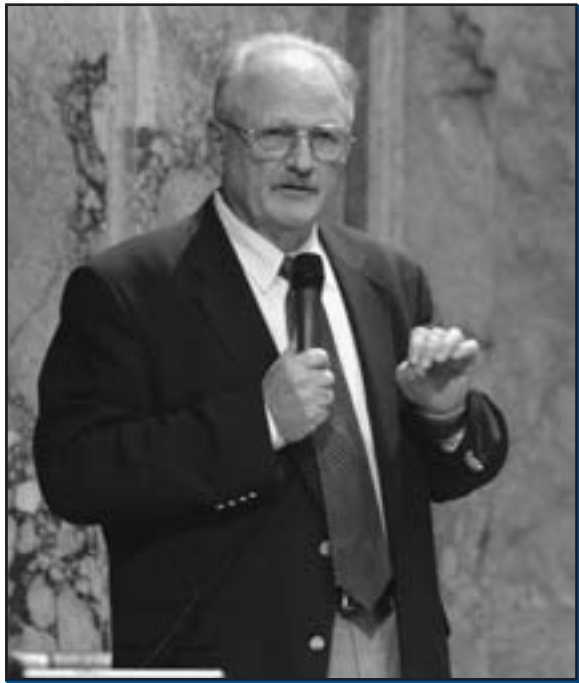
Have you heard of the Running Start program that gives enterprising high-school students a chance to get a jump on their college education? We set up a Running Start for the Trades program this year to provide the same kind of opportunities for high-school students who are interested in a career in the trades.

Working to provide
more high-quality jobs
for Washington’s citizens

It’s my belief that small businesspeople and other working families aren’t asking for the moon — just a decent opportunity to put healthy food on their table, a safe roof over their heads, and (as I noted earlier) the financial and emotional security of dependable health coverage. That’s not too much to ask.

This year in the Legislature, we highlighted infrastructure projects in our local communities both to make our towns more attractive for new and expanding businesses and to help more of our citizens obtain good-paying jobs. We created the Energy Freedom Program to encourage the development of the emerging biofuels industry, and we did away with the sales and use taxes on farm fuel. Also for the agriculture industry, we established tax exemptions for replacement parts for farm machinery and equipment.

As a way to get more folks started in good-paying careers, we expanded the apprenticeship program in the Department of Transportation.



Floor discussion
in the House of
Representatives
this session
included Hood
Canal legislation
that I sponsored.

Inside photo by Terry Hull, Puget Sound Action Team

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Capital Budget
Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks

HOOD CANAL: Losing it is not an option!

Spring 2006

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

I appreciate your taking the time to review my 2006 legislative newsletter. We finished this year’s session a day ahead of schedule, agreeing on a balanced supplemental budget with no new taxes!

As always, let me emphasize what an honor and exciting challenge it is to represent our 35th District communities of Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, and Thurston counties.

One of the biggest challenges has been reversing the rapid decline of our great Olympic fjord, Hood Canal. Our national treasure continues as my primary focus in the House of Representatives — just as it has been since I started out here more than eight years ago. I was gratified to be appointed about a year and a half ago to chair the Select Committee on Hood Canal.

My *Report to the 35th District* today lays out the specifics in our mission to reinvigorate America’s wonderful, one-of-a-kind fjord. I’ve also detailed several of the other important topics that came before us this year.

Please don’t hesitate to call or write whenever you have comments or questions!

Sincerely,

William Eickmeyer
State Representative
35th Legislative District

Representative William Eickmeyer

Report to the 35th District

Striving to restore Hood Canal — Washington's great Olympics fjord

In 2004 when large quantities of gilled marine life in the Hood Canal began dying, it was quickly established that a lack of dissolved oxygen in the water was the culprit.

The House of Representatives in December of that year established a full Select Committee on the Hood Canal. I had the great privilege of being given the chairmanship of that committee. Since then we have heard more than 100 hours of testimony and conducted numerous investigative tours. The governor's office commissioned a full-scale study of the dissolved- oxygen problem with the University of Washington, headed by Dr. Jan Newton.

We called for testimony from experts in Canada and the United States who have worked on dissolved-oxygen problems in others areas. One such area is the massive project on the Chesapeake Bay, which involved six states. We also investigated emerging technologies, some of which were developed in foreign countries as well as the United States.

We also started gathering available data on the Hood Canal, only to find that such information was woefully lacking. It became apparent that we would need to build a science base on the Hood Canal from scratch.

We passed legislation designating the Hood Canal Watershed as an Aquatic Rehabilitation Zone. We also passed legislation creating a partnership of stewardship for the Hood Canal Coordinating Council, represented by the three counties of Mason, Kitsap and Jefferson, as well as the affected tribes and the Puget Sound Action Team in the governor's office. Further, we passed an aquatic account, which can receive and distribute funding designated for the Hood Canal. These three pieces of legislation provide the infrastructure for future activities on the Hood Canal.

* Building a science base *

Taking nothing for granted, our committee placed all the possibilities on the table and then started narrowing down to the probabilities.

First, we looked at the geography. The canal is some 60 miles in length, narrow and very deep with a blocking sill at the end made of solid stone and rising 450 feet from the bottom. (Like a bathtub without a drain.) It's a classic fjord; the only one in the United States. Second, we asked what is the direct cause of the low-oxygen problem? We have commissioned a study to investigate that phenomenon. And third, we asked how the Canal can be assisted in becoming healthy again. We're looking at nature's own immune system.

The studies now underway are focusing on what actually causes a loss of dissolved oxygen. What are the natural contributions to this problem and which are man-made? What constitutes a normal, healthy ecosystem? And what causes an imbalance in that system?

The studies we have commissioned should give us some of those answers, as well as guidance in finding the right and lasting solutions.

In the meantime, we know that some of our state parks on the Hood Canal have failed septic systems. Funding has been provided to retrofit these systems as soon as possible.

It is not possible in this newsletter to discuss everything that is being contemplated. But let me emphasize two things: We are confident that we will succeed. And we know that failure to save the Canal is not an option.

Legislature places renewed emphasis on public safety, family security

The 2006 Legislature discussed a number of measures aimed at improving safety and security for Washington citizens in our homes, on our streets, and around our communities.

One very important area of discussion in Olympia involved criminals who commit the most heinous offenses.

As a result of new policies enacted this session, sex offenders will face tougher sentences. We increased monitoring for the most serious sex offenders. The registration-requirements are tightened up for sex offenders who move in to our state, and we also bolstered penalties for sex offenders who fail to register. Another new law tightens protection for sexual-assault victims and the advocates who are working with them. People who possess child pornography and people who commit a crime with a sexual motivation will face tougher sentencing.

Another key area of family security we addressed this year involves identity theft. Specifically, we stiffened the sentencing for criminals who steal our identities.

Finally, we strengthened security for the men and women who guard our freedom. Our active-duty armed-forces personnel, National Guard members, military veterans, and the service families will see greater assistance in case they fall on hard times.

Safe and reliable health care for citizens is a very reachable objective

Very few things are more important to a person's sense of well-being than knowing that appropriate health care is available if a family member needs it — especially a child or an elderly citizen.

A new state policy approved in the supplemental budget this year means that 6,500 more citizens will receive coverage in our landmark Basic Health Program.

We also added health coverage to bring total enrollment in the Children's Health Program to 14,000 Washington young people. (As you may recall, we set an objective of making sure that every Washington child is covered for health care by the year 2010.) Nursing-home repayment rates are increased for home-care agency workers who help senior citizens and disabled citizens. Medicaid premiums are eliminated for youngsters in low-income families.

The new budget also includes funding to provide more assistance for community clinics, and to plan for a pandemic-flu outbreak.

Legislation approved this year introduces an assistance program to help more small businesses provide health insurance for their workers. Additional coverage will also be made available for more citizens to receive breast-cancer and cervical-cancer screenings. This year's landmark legislation for medical-malpractice reform will increase patient-safety, and keep the ball rolling toward less expensive medical-malpractice premiums.

Community schools today are preparing young people to run things tomorrow

There simply isn't a better investment we can make for the future than providing a good solid education in the present. Remember: Learning starts right from the get-go. Just as soon as a youngster is born, he or she starts acquiring information that will be put to use for a lifetime.

Recognizing the significance of getting kids off to a strong start in kindergarten, we created the Department of Early Learning. The goal is to make sure the work we're doing in early-childhood education is aimed squarely at helping kids launch their school careers. We also strengthened assistance programs in special-education for our youngest children who have disabilities.

Our legislative discussions weren't limited, though, to topics involving the youngest students in our schools.

Most of you know that the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) requirements are kicking in, obliging students to meet relatively rigorous graduation requirements. One of the most important education bills we passed this year will send assistance to schools so they can help students who are struggling with the WASL requirements.

The Legislature also set up alternative paths to graduation for high-school seniors who cannot seem to pass the new testing standards, but do well in other areas.

New Opportunity Grants established this session will help low-income students receive training to get them ready for high-demand careers. Also in the area of higher education, we increased enrollments for young people interested in math and science because, frankly, that's where a lot of the new jobs are happening in the 21st century.